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Letter dated 17 April 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter from the representative of the Syrian National Coalition dated 17 April 2015 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mark **Lyall Grant**

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Annex to the letter dated 17 April 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

It is with great urgency that I alert the Security Council to a new and deadly set of chemical weapons attacks perpetrated by Syrian regime aerial forces in the Syrian governorate of Idlib.

On the evening of 16 April 2015 at approximately 11 p.m., double chemical aerial strikes were launched in the villages of Sermin and Korin in the Idlib governorate. Evidence gathered from the site indicates the deployment of barrel bombs loaded with the toxic chemical agent chlorine gas. Gas canisters were among the barrel bomb remnants found at the impact sites.

Following the attacks, at least 20 victims suffered from suffocation and were taken to field hospitals for immediate treatment. Among those injured were civilians, including a mother and her children. Doctors and witnesses present at the site, as well as photographic footage, offer clear evidence that the victims suffered from asphyxiation from toxic gas deployed after aerial bombardment. First responders present at the site reported the distinctive smell of chlorine gas following the chemical attacks.

There is every reason to believe that the chemical agent used against innocent civilians in Idlib governorate was chlorine gas. Sample testing of earlier alleged attacks definitively proves the use of highly concentrated chlorine in civilian-occupied areas of Idlib. No less than 206 people were affected by such attacks in the month of March alone, including 20 Syrian civil defence workers.

Yesterday's attacks in Idlib came just hours after members of the Security Council heard live testimony from chemical weapons survivors and witnesses on the continued use of chemical weapons by Syrian regime forces. The testimonies moved members of the Security Council to tears. It is time that the evidence propelled Member States to act.

On behalf of the people of Syria and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, I therefore urge Member States to act with urgency to:

- **Enforce Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2209 (2015) and impose measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.** In its resolution 2209 (2015), the Security Council states that in the event of future non-compliance with Council resolution 2118 (2013), the Council will "impose measures under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter". The will of the Council has repeatedly been violated. It is time Council resolution 2118 (2013) was enforced.

- **Protect Syrian civilians from future chemical weapons attacks by authorizing a no-fly zone.** The only way to stop Syrian chemical attacks by air is to ground the Syrian regime's air forces. A no-fly zone would effectively stop the barrel bombs that cause so much destruction and devastation across Syria. Why should the brave Syrian first responders be subjected to an aerial threat that could so easily be prevented? Should the Security Council fail to

uphold its legal responsibility to authorize a no-fly zone, it is incumbent upon individual Member States to do so.

- **Mandate the fact-finding mission of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to determine responsibility.** Member States have called on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) fact-finding mission on chlorine gas attacks in Syria to examine the March attacks in Idlib. The mission has not, however, been given a mandate to determine responsibility. If the Security Council is serious about stopping future atrocities and ensuring accountability, then it must instruct the fact-finding mission to determine responsibility for the chlorine gas attacks.

- **Refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.** To bring justice to the victims of Syria's chemical weapons attacks and deter future war crimes in Syria, the Security Council should move urgently to adopt a resolution referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. Doing so would lay the path towards accountability and ensure that all those guilty of war crimes are held responsible in a court of law.

The Syrian regime has systematically violated the Chemical Weapons Convention, which Syria ratified in October 2013, as well as Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015). It has repeatedly killed innocent civilians, including women and children, with toxic chlorine gas. The Security Council is aware of such crimes. And yet it has done too little to stop them. But there is still time to save innocent lives. A no-fly zone would offer immediate protection. It would effectively stop the deadly onslaught of barrel bombs. And it would allow for the implementation of safe zones. A no-fly zone is not a panacea, but it is a way to dramatically reduce the suffering. The Syrian people want and need a no-fly zone. Member States should authorize it.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations